



THE BEST OF BOTH HABITS: JOHN STUART MILL AND WORDSWORTHIAN CULTURING

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This paper examines the connection between the poetry and the poetic method of William Wordsworth and John Stuart Mill's recovery from his mental breakdown. I argue that Mill believed that his rigorous education had instilled in him powerful habits of analysis, and that these habits had caused his feelings to dissolve. His feelings had been created by rather artificial means, he believed, such as punishments and rewards that had no rational connection with their object. Hence, Mill's ingrained habits of analysis caused him to "analyze away" these feelings by showing that there was not really any rational basis for them. Wordsworth, I argue, showed Mill that with a habit of contemplation, the destructive tendencies of analysis could be reversed while leaving the habit of analysis intact. By contemplating the conclusions reached by analysis, one is often able to generate feelings about them, thereby forming associations between pleasure or pain and the object of contemplation. This, according to Mill, is what feelings are made of. Hence, contemplation can function as the proper complement to the otherwise destructive force of analysis. All of this, importantly, is explicable on Mill's psychological theory of Associationism. Hence, Wordsworth was able to show Mill that he could keep the best of both of his habits: Mill was able to maintain the rigorous powers of analysis that he found so valuable, but he also learned to cultivate his feelings through contemplation.

